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Ser. No. 10/573,214

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

Please replace the claims with the claims provided in the listing below wherein status, amendments, additions and cancellations are indicated.

1. (Currently Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

a liquid permeable front sheet;

a back sheet;

an absorbent body disposed between the liquid permeable front sheet and the back sheet, and having opposing outer absorbent body edges extending in a longitudinal direction of the absorbent body;

said absorbent body having a standard-height portion and a middle-height portion ~~[[layered]]~~ laminated as a layer over said standard height portion in a thickness direction of said absorbent body, said standard-height portion being on a side of the absorbent body facing the back sheet;

said absorbent body having the middle-height portion in an approximately center area of the absorbent body, and the middle-height portion extending longitudinally to first and second middle-height portion longitudinal ends;

said middle-height portion having opposing middle-height portion side edge steps and a constant middle-height portion thickness extending from one of said

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opposing middle-height portion side edge steps to another one of said opposing middle-height portion side edge steps;

said standard-height portion extending beyond both said opposing middle-height portion side edge steps to said opposing outer absorbent body edges, said standard-height portion having a constant standard-height portion thickness extending from one of said opposing outer absorbent body edges to another one of said opposing outer absorbent body edges;

leakage preventing grooves, extending in said longitudinal direction of the absorbent article which is orthogonal to a lateral direction extending between said opposing outer absorbent body edges, said leakage preventing grooves being provided in the area of the middle-height portion of the absorbent body and on either side of a mid-portion of the middle-height portion positioned about midway between the first and second middle-height portion longitudinal ends, and said leakage preventing grooves having ~~[[with]]~~ opposing side walls of said grooves being formed in said middle-height portion such that depths of said opposing side walls of said leakage preventing grooves are equal on opposing sides of said leakage preventing grooves; ~~[[and]]~~

said leakage preventing grooves extending longitudinally at positions proximate said opposing middle-height portion side edge steps of the middle-height portion so as to border the mid-portion of the middle-height portion on both

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longitudinally extending sides of the mid-portion, respectively, up to positions proximate said first and second middle-height portion longitudinal ends; and

the leakage preventing grooves being deeper than said constant middle-height portion thickness and extending into the standard-height portion of the absorbent body.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein a thinned portion of absorbent material is provided extending outward from said opposing middle-height portion side edge steps of the middle-height portion, said thinned portion have a thinned portion thickness less than said constant middle-height portion thickness.

4. (Currently Amended) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein ~~the middle-height portion extends to first and second middle-height portion longitudinal ends and~~ said absorbent body extends beyond said first and second middle-height portion longitudinal ends, and front and rear folds, folding the absorbent article in three into a packaging configuration, extend in said lateral

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direction and are respectively disposed in the standard-height portion beyond said first and second middle-height portion longitudinal ends.

5. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 2, wherein a thickness of the standard-height portion absorbent body is 1 to 3 mm.

6. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 5 wherein said constant middle-height portion thickness is in the range of 1.5 to 8.0 mm.

7. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 6 wherein said leakage preventing grooves are formed in said absorbent article to have a groove depth H extending from said front sheet to a groove bottom, and said groove depth H is in the range of 0.5 to 9.0 mm.

8. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 7 wherein said leakage preventing grooves are formed in said absorbent article to have a groove depth H, and a ratio of said groove depth H to said constant standard-height portion thickness is in the range of 0.06 to 3.3.

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9. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 8 wherein said leakage preventing grooves have a bottom width B in the range of 0.5 to 5.0 mm.

10. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 5 wherein said constant middle-height portion thickness is in the range of 2.0 to 4.0 mm.

11. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 10 wherein said leakage preventing grooves are formed in said absorbent article to have a groove depth H extending from said front sheet to a groove bottom, and said groove depth H is in the range of 2.0 to 6.0 mm.

12. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 11 wherein said leakage preventing grooves are formed in said absorbent article to have a groove depth H, and a ratio of said groove depth H to said constant standard-height portion thickness is in the range of 0.2 to 0.8.

13. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 1, wherein a thickness of the standard-height portion absorbent body is 1 to 3 mm.



